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‘Making it’: practitioners’ views on literary celebrity

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This Forum offers a view on literary celebrity from professionals working outside the academy. As a deviation from the usual practices of *Celebrity Studies*, these Forum contributions are not intended to provide purely academic insights into celebrity. Rather, they function as provocative think-pieces, allowing the contributors to reflect on their own understanding of literary celebrity, based on years of experience working in the literary industries. This section therefore makes space for those who often constitute the object of academic study to consider their own professional experience of operating within literary worlds.

We do not present this in order to advocate a biographically positivist approach to the academic study of celebrity. Instead, following Anders Ohlsson *et al.* (2014), our objective is to diversify literary celebrity as an object of study still further. If it is important for scholars of literary celebrity to consider the full range of genres and types of fictions produced, as well as to incorporate a view on celebrity that is both geographically and temporally far reaching (Ohlsson *et al.* 2014), then extending our scope to include the direct insights of literary professionals in their own words emerges as a practical manoeuvre that aids the diversification of the field.

We have invited perspectives from as diverse a group as possible: an internationally renowned author, a literary agent working in the UK and India, an up-and-coming Indian writer, a British newspaper literary editor, and an international translator and literary prize judge. The range of contributors featured here helps us think through the different worlds in which literary celebrity exists, highlighting the sheer variety of people and contexts involved in the complex processes of literary celebrity. Their insights reveal that these processes extend far beyond the individual author and emphasise the highly networked position of literary practitioners in all fields (see Braun in this issue, also Galow 2011, York 2013). The contributors also emphasise the real-world considerations at stake across multiple literary contexts when it comes to matters of professional acclaim: the question of financial security, the importance of sales figures and prizes, space for creative work, family and private life, and the obstacles in place as a result of the aleatory factors of caste, race, gender or language. As a result, their articles not only illuminate industry-based perceptions of literary celebrity, but also shed light on the complex and diverse intersections between literature and the types of wider practical and social considerations already outlined.

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Margaret Drabble begins by taking the long view of her literary career, probing her relationship to literary celebrity and her motivations for writing. With the descriptions of her careful management of public visibility and anonymity, Drabble's piece reminds us that celebrity attraction is contingent upon the biographical body of the author (Mole 2007, see also Harrington and Elliott in this issue). If public appearances are not carefully managed, the authorial body may become as exposed as the sticking plaster revealed on the Queen Mother's ankle when bestowing Drabble with her royal honour.

Katy Guest brings her years of experience as literary editor of the *Independent on Sunday* to her analysis of authors' proactive strategies for cultivating celebrity via social media (see Marshall 2010, Marwick and Boyd 2011), but she also highlights the tensions that emerge between establishing a profile through accumulating 'attention capital' (Rojek 2014, p. 456) and maintaining space, physically and psychologically, for creative work. Her account of how both publishers and fans stake their claim to the body of author George R.R. Martin, which becomes valuable only as a vehicle for delivering the next, much anticipated *Game of Thrones* volume, is a striking example of such tension.

Frank Wynne, who offers a translator's view of celebrity, exemplifies how literary celebrity is also a process involving multiple agents across multiple contexts. He focuses on the importance of both the translator and literary prizes in establishing authors' reputations across cultural contexts (see Spencer 2013, Braun 2011, 2015), but also illuminates the transnational network of other stakeholders, advocates and gatekeepers who play a role in the processes of celebrity making.

Sridhar Gowda and Gaurav Somwanshi's joint article highlights how literary celebrity is also a product, one made available via the body of the author and the processes of celebrity for wider cultural appropriation. Their piece demonstrates how literary celebrity in India is often, in fact, a product of caste and linguistic privilege, thus offering a critical insider's and non-western perspective on cultural diversity in the book market (see also Sapiro 2010). Through the example of the neglected public intellectual, Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, they show how systemic imbalances and discriminatory practices in publishing and media industries translate into imbalances in the material culture of celebrity in both India and the dominant English-speaking platforms of 'world literature'. In this way, the material culture of literary celebrity confronts us with the partialities and omissions in society in a way that exclusively textual readings of authors cannot.

The following Forum pieces throw light on the process of 'making it' as a celebrity in various literary worlds from the perspective of those living and working in those worlds. Through the lens of literary celebrity, they provide us with insight into the challenges faced by creative practitioners of different types, the ambiguities, tensions and contradictions of the systems they work in, but also a striking understanding of their motivations for doing what they do. As such, their contributions clearly demonstrate the advantages of incorporating industry and creative perspectives into the academic study of literary celebrity in order to continue to diversify the field of research and deepen understandings of the social relationships that underpin and sustain celebrity practices.

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Emily Spiers is Lecturer in Creative Futures at Lancaster University, UK. She is currently revising the final draft of her monograph, *The Making of Pop-Feminist Narratives: A Comparative Study*, for publication with OUP in 2017. She has co-edited with Birgit Mikus a 2016 special issue of *Oxford German Studies* on 'Fractured Legacies: Historical, Cultural and Political Perspectives on German Feminism'. She is contributing a chapter on Kate Tempest to the forthcoming OUP volume *Homer and Contemporary Women's Writing*, edited by Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos. Further recent articles on digital performances of authorship have appeared in the journals *Feminist Media Studies* and *Woman: A Cultural Review*.

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